Millennial knickers in a twist; There's an ethical revolution in underwear. Seriously

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Body

You probably remember where you were when you heard that Victoria's Secret would stop publishing its catalogue.

Or that thongs were out of fashion.

It's a whole new story out there in the world o'undies, and that's because of millennial shoppers.

You know the ones - those socially conscious 18-to-35-year-olds who want the things they consume to be useful, as well as beautiful. Authenticity is the name of their game, and that is rapidly changing what is and isn't acceptable in a myriad of products, bras and knickers included.

Don't be coming around here trying to sell them your tacky, eco-destructive, petrochemical-based synthetic undies, friend. They aren't buying.

Millennial underwear is made from natural or recycled materials in an ethical fashion that hurts neither the environment nor the workers sewing it.

And if buying that underwear (preferably online) also benefits some group or charity, all the better.

Our eyes were opened to these upheavals in undies by Toronto's Reve Rouge, an online shop (with a store in Bayview Village) that bills itself as the city's millennial-minded lingerie destination.

For those of us who consider Costco a lingerie destination, it was a steep learning curve.

Reve Rouge carries a German line of body wear called Opaak, which they describe as eco-sexy, sporty intimates involving recycled materials, including a fabric made of post-consumer plastic that's recycled into new fibres.

The designs are simple, the colours straightforward (black, red, white) and it's all very ethically sustainable and edifying.

To learn more, we turned to Anne Jardine, a senior marketing consultant at The Mind Farm in Washington, D.C. and a former honcho with Vanity Fair lingerie. A Harvard grad who knows bras, Jardine was able to explain the millennial underwear phenomenon, adding hard facts to generational philosophy.

For starters, explains Jardine, eco consciousness is on the rise and may be considered a reaction against the environmental sins of previous generations.

Until about a decade ago, however, living up to those high-minded ideals was expensive.

Says Jardine, "Few would pay the premium attached to organic, fair-trade, eco-friendly ingredients and processes from high cost manufacturing countries like Germany, Scandinavia or the U.S."

There were three big changes in the last 10 years, says Jardine, that altered the business: new technology drove down the cost of cutting and sewing, changing labour costs moved a lot of manufacturing out of China and back to the U.S. and Mexico, and then there was extreme consolidation within the industry itself.

"That's put more volume into fewer hands,"she said.

Speaking of fewer hands, did you know Amazon sells a helluva lot of underwear? Those millennials do like to shop from home.

Jardine helpfully suggests that the counter-trend to all that consolidation is tiny, personalized, boutique online brands.

Sure enough, thegoodtrade. com has listed a baker's dozen of ethical and organic lingerie brands (for the modern woman), and it's interesting how the advertising has changed.

Some of the underwear models are life-sized - rather than stick thin - some are small-breasted and nobody is posing in a particularly comehither fashion; what's missing here is the male gaze. That's kind of terrific.

Words that pop up a lot are basic, reclaimed, recycled, organic, green, soft and sustainable; there are products for bigger-busted women and the LGBTQIA community and at least one line offers vegan materials.

Some give to charity when you buy their products. One (Naja) trains and employs single mothers in Colombia. Naja also has a nude collection - which comes in seven shades of nude.

That's progress. It's all here: Meanwhile, don't lose any sleep over Victoria's Secret. They still command a huge market share and are seen as desirable by most of middle America.

So pushed-up and padded, squeezed, flattened, rounded, bound, trussed, constricted and otherwise tortured is still happening, never you fear.

Says Jardine, "The Victoria's Secret fashion show still gets very high TV ratings.

"It's mostly a PR event for prime time, acceptable soft porn."

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